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RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 5867
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RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC

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SUBJECT: Jordan Waives Overstay Fees for 6,000 Workers in QIZ
Factories

REF: 07 Amman 4991

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¶1. (U) The Jordanian Cabinet approved February 27 a request by the Ministries of Labor and Interior to waive approximately JD 6 million (USD 8.5 million) in overstay fines for over 6,000 foreign workers in the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs), mainly from South Asia. According to the Ministry of Labor (MOL), many of these workers began accruing overstay penalties when their employers went out of business and left the country due to financial or labor problems revealed in a May 2006 National Labor Committee (NLC) report. Fines of 1.5 JD (USD 2.12) per day accrued for every day that the workers were "illegally" in Jordan. NOTE: Any expatriate in Jordan out of legal status accrues the 1.5 JD/day overstay fine, which must be paid before departure. END NOTE. In some cases, fines accrued because the GOJ did not process the paperwork in a timely fashion after having transferred workers from closed-down factories to new factories. In other cases, the factory management had not presented the proper paperwork.

¶2. (SBU) The GOJ had issued temporary worker permits for these individuals in August 2007, with the assistance of the Jordan Garments, Accessories, and Textiles Exporters' Association (JGATE). Despite the temporary permits, however, workers reportedly felt hindered by the lack of a permanent work permit and residency card, not wanting to travel outside QIZ grounds without the proper paperwork. Such workers were also not allowed to leave the country until overstay fees had been settled, causing some to apply for and receive a special waiver of fees for humanitarian reasons from the Ministry of Interior. The permit issue caused an increasing number of strikes in the QIZs, demanding that the workers' status be regularized (reftel).

¶3. (U) The recent waiver of the fees will now allow the completion of the regularization process, the modalities of which are still under consideration by the MOL in consultation with the private sector. According to MOL, QIZ employers will have to pay for new work permits for their employees listed on the approved waiver list. Permits cost JD240 (USD 339) for each QIZ foreign worker, and the fees will help offset the lost revenue from the waivers. Some QIZ factories have also already begun sending home some workers whose

contracts have ended or who wish to leave Jordan for family, health, or other personal reasons.

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Rubinstein